

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 QUITO 04812 01 OF 03 131600Z
ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8775
INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 QUITO 4812

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: AT THE WIRE

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: SUNDAY'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, WHILE OF ENORMOUS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PROCESS TO RETURN ECUADOR TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT BY THE END OF THIS YEAR, IS UNLIKELY TO PRODUCE AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY WINNER. IT WILL THUS SET THE STAGE FOR A SECOND RUN-OFF OF THE TOP TWO FINISHERS IN ABOUT TWO MONTHS HENCE. OF THE SIX CANDIDATES, ONLY FOUR -- DURAN-BALLEN, HUERTA, ROLDON, AND BORJA -- ARE EXPECTED TO POLL SIGNIFICANTLY, AND ONLY THE FORMER THREE ARE EXPECTED TO VIE FOR THE RUN-OFF POSITIONS. THE ELECTIONS ARE EXPECTED BY MOST TO BE CONDUCTED FREELY AND FAIRLY; HOWEVER, RESERVATIONS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL, WHICH HAS NOT DISTINGUISHED ITSELF FOR INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE THUS FAR. A BELATED CALL FOR OAS OBSERVERS HAS BEEN REJECTED BY THE GOE. IF NOT BY FRAUD, THE ELECTIONS COULD BE BESMIRCHED BY CONFUSION GROWING OUT OF THE LACK OF PREPARATION BY THE TRIBUNAL. DESPITE A NUMBER OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN THE PAST FEW
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 QUITO 04812 01 OF 03 131600Z

WEEKS, ELECTION DAY IS UNLIKELY TO SEE PUBLIC ORDER PROBLEMS. IF ALL GOES WELL, SIGNIFICANT RESULTS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE BY MONDAY MORNING. END SUMMARY.

2. APPROXIMATELY 2.1 MILLION ECUADOREANS WILL GO TO THE POLLS ON SUNDAY, JULY 16 TO SELECT A PRESIDENT FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1968 AS PART OF THE TWO PLUS YEAR OLD PROCESS OF

TRANSFERRING POWER FROM THE DE FACTO MILITARY GOVERNMENT TO A CONSTITUTIONAL CIVILIAN REGIME BY THE END OF 1978. HOWEVER, SINCE NO CANDIDATE IS LIKELY TO ACHIEVE THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY REQUIRED BY THE NEW CONSTITUTION, THE EFFECT OF THE SUNDAY ELECTION WILL PROBABLY BE LIMITED TO ELIMINATING FOUR OF THE SIX PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS FROM A SECOND RUN-OFF WHICH WILL LIKELY BE HELD IN SEPTEMBER. VOTERS WILL ALSO SELECT MAYORS OF CITIES, PROVINCIAL PREFECTS, AND HALF OF THE ALLOTTED MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL COUNCIL-MANIC SEATS.

3. THERE IS A GENERAL EXPECTATION HERE THAT THE ELECTION WILL BE CONDUCTED FAIRLY AND FREELY, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SOME SUBDUED MUTTERINGS ABOUT A POSSIBLE ATTEMPT AT FRAUD. THE GENERAL OPTIMISM IS BASED UPON THE PERCEPTION THAT THE ELECTION MECHANISM HAS BECOME FAIRLY WELL IMMUNIZED FROM TAMPERING BY THE REFORMS INTRODUCED EARLIER THIS YEAR. IF FRAUD WERE TO BE ATTEMPTED, MOST REASON IT WOULD HAVE TO BE DONE BLATANTLY AND OBVIOUSLY, AND THEREBY RISK BEING IMMEDIATELY DENOUNCED. SINCE IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT, WHILE PERHAPS LEANING TOWARD CERTAIN CANDIDATES AND AWAY FROM OTHERS, DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT INCENTIVE TO MAKE A DETERMINED ATTEMPT TO FIDDLE WITH THE VOTING, IT IS UNLIKELY TO RESORT TO SUCH TACTICS. THE GOE HAS MADE SEVERAL STATEMENTS THIS WEEK GUARANTEEING THE PURITY OF THE ELECTIONS.
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 QUITO 04812 01 OF 03 131600Z

4. THOSE WHO HAVE THEIR DOUBTS POINT TO THE HISTORY OF THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (SET) SINCE ITS COMPOSITION WAS ALTERED DRASTICALLY AFTER THE JANUARY REFERENDUM. THEY CHARGE THAT IT IS COMPLETELY WITHOUT INTEGRITY AND THAT IT IS CONTROLLED BY THE MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT WHICH CAN MANIPULATE THE SET FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES. THIS ARGUMENT POSSESSES A GREAT DEAL OF VALIDITY; HOWEVER, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW MUCH INFLUENCE THE SET WILL HAVE IN LIGHT OF THE SYSTEM ESTABLISHED FOR ELECTRONIC COMPUTATION OF RESULTS AND OTHER VOTE-COUNTING SAFEGUARDS. PERPAHS MUCH MORE LIKELY IS THAT THE ELECTION WILL BE BESMIRCHED BY THE INEPTITUDE AND INCOMPETENCE THAT THE SET AND THE NATIONAL CIVIL REGISTRY HAVE THUS FAR DISPLAYED IN PREPARING FOR THE BALLOTING. IN THE JANUARY REFERENDUM 110 PERCENT OF THOSE ON THE VOTING LISTS WERE ABLE TO DEPOSIT THEIR VOTES WHEN IT WAS DISCOVERED THAT THE LISTS WERE INCOMPLETE AND FORMER SET PRESIDENT GALO PLAZA MADE THE JUDICIOUS DECISION TO RELAX THE REQUIREMENTS AT THE LAST MINUTE AND ALLOW THOSE OTHERWISE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE. SIX MONTHS LATER AND THE LISTS ARE STILL INCOMPLETE, PRECISE POLLING INFORMATION IS BEING DIVULGED SLOWLY, AND VOTING

TABLES MAY NOT BE ABLE TO ATTEND TO THE 500 NAMES ON EACH OF THEIR LISTS DURING THE ALLOTTED 12 HOURS OF VOTING. VOTING IS OBLIGATORY AND IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 97 PERCENT OF THOSE QUALIFIED WILL ATTEMPT TO CAST THEIR VOTE, AT LEAST TO AVOID THE PENALTIES ATTENDANT ON NOT VOTING. HOWEVER, THE SET VICE-PRESIDENT GLIBLY COMMENTED LAST WEEK THAT PERHAPS 10-12 PERCENT WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO VOTE BECAUSE OF FOUL-UPS. OTHER POLITICAL OBSERVERS HAVE CHARGED THAT THE RATE MAY GO UP TO 20 PERCENT IN PROVINCES SUCH AS MANABI WHERE UNUSUAL DIFFICULTIES HAVE BEEN NOTICED.

5. ELECTION DAY IS EXPECTED TO BE FREE FROM ANY SERIOUS VIOLENCE. THIS ASSESSMENT IS PRIMARILY BASED UPON THE ABSENCE OF ANY ORGANIZED TERRORIST GROUP IN ECUADOR AND
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 QUITO 04812 01 OF 03 131600Z

THE RELATIVE TRANQUILITY IN WHICH THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS DEVELOPED THUS FAR. NEVERTHELESS, VIOLENCE, WHILE STILL AT THE LOW LEVEL IN COMPARISON WITH PAST CAMPAIGNS, HAS INCREASED NOTICEABLY IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS THERE HAVE BEEN SHOOTINGS, CLASHES BETWEEN RIVAL GROUPS, AND SABOTAGING OF RALLIES IN QUITO, MANABI, GUAYAQUIL, AND LOS RIOS. IN VIEW OF THIS, THE GOE IS TAKING NO CHANCES AND HAS DEVISED A MASSIVE PLAN TO PREVENT DISTURBANCES ON ELECTION DAY.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 QUITO 04812 02 OF 03 131708Z

ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 QUITO 4812

6. MUCH OF THE RESIDUAL SUSPICION REGARDING THE INTEGRITY OF THE PROCESS MIGHT HAVE BEEN ALLAYED IF INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS, AT LEAST FROM THE OAS, HAD BEEN INVITED TO WITNESS THE PROCESS. HOWEVER, THE POLITICAL PARTIES APPARENTLY DISTRACTED BY THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF, FAILED TO RAISE THE SUBJECT UNTIL A FEW DAYS AGO. THE SUGGESTION WAS REJECTED BY JOSE BAQUERO DE LA CALLE, PRESIDENT OF THE SET, WHO SAID THAT ECUADOR DID NOT NEED THE TUTELAGE OF ANYONE ELSE TO CONDUCT ELECTIONS. SECRETARY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ADMIRAL VICTOR GARCES REAFFIRMED THE DECISION ON JULY 11, EXPLAINING THAT THE ELECTION WAS "AN INTERNAL PROCESS OF THE NATIONAL LIFE". HE ADDED THAT ECUADOR'S DOORS ARE OPEN TO ALL FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WHO WISH TO COVER THE ELECTION. (THUS FAR ONLY TWO US NEWSPAPER MEN -- AP AND UPI -- HAVE CHECKED IN WITH THE EMBASSY.) THE DECISION WAS ONLY MILDLY PROTESTED BY THE PARTIES, INDICATIVE OF THEIR BASIC CONFIDENCE IN THE PROCESS.

7. THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION ITSELF IS NOT AT ALL CLEAR ONLY THREE DAYS FROM THE POLLS. OF THE SIX CANDIDATES, ONLY FOUR -- SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN (NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONALIST

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 QUITO 04812 02 OF 03 131708Z

FRONT -- CENTER/RIGHT), RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA (LIBERAL, ET AL. -- CENTRIST), JAIME ROLDOS AGUILERA (CONCENTRATION OF POPULAR FORCES -- POPULIST/CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT), AND RODRIGO BORJA (DEMOCRATIC LEFT -- CENTER/LEFT) -- ARE LIKELY TO ATTRACT A SIGNIFICANT VOTE. HOWEVER, MOST PERCEIVE BORJA TRAILING THE OTHER THREE BY AT LEAST 5 PERCENT AND THUS THE CONTEST FOR THE FIRST TWO PLACES WILL PROBABLY BE FOUGHT OUT AMONG DURAN-BALLEN, HUERTA, AND ROLDOS.

8. DURAN-BALLEN PROBABLY STILL MUST BE CONSIDERED THE FRONTRUNNER ALTHOUGH ALL REPORTS INDICATE THAT HIS STRENGTH HAS BEEN ERODING IN RECENT WEEKS DESPITE AN EXPENSIVE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN. THE WORST NEWS FOR THE DURAN-BALLEN CAMP HAS BEEN THE RESULT OF POLLS, INCLUDING ITS OWN, INDICATING THAT HIS POSITION IN THE TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC CONSERVATIVE PROVINCES OF THE SIERRA IS NOT NEARLY SO COMMANDING AS HAD BEEN PREDICTED. IN 1968 TWO RIGHT OF CENTER CANDIDATES POLLED 45 PERCENT OF THE SIERRA VOTE OUTSIDE ATYPICAL QUITO; BUT DURAN'S OWN CAMPAIGN MANAGER RECENTLY ADMITTED THAT WHILE SIXTO IS LEADING IN THE SIERRA, HIS MARGIN OVER THE OTHER THREE SERIOUS CONTENDERS IS NARROW. HOWEVER, HE ALSO PREDICTED THAT DURAN-BALLEN WOULD DO MUCH BETTER ON THE COAST THAN ANY PREVIOUS RIGHT OF CENTER CANDIDATE. SIXTO'S SLIDE, HOWEVER, HAS BEN

PARTICULARLY PRECIPITOUS IN GUAYAQUIL WHERE HE WAS SEEN AS LEADING IN MAY. HE NOW MAY HAVE SLIPPED TO A THIRD PLACE SHOWING TODAY AS HE HAS LOST LOWER CLASS VOTES TO ROLDOS AND MIDDLE CLASS VOTES TO HUERTA. DURAN HAS ALSO BEEN THE TARGET OF MOST OF THE PERSONAL ATTACKS LAUNCHED DURING THE CAMPAIGN OWING TO HIS POSITION AS FRONTRUNNER, AS WELL AS TO THE FACT THAT HE IS THE ONLY RIGHT OF CENTER CANDIDATE. ONE OF THE MORE NAGGING PROBLEMS HAS BEEN THAT OF HIS BIRTH IN THE US AND THE RESULTING DOUBTS ABOUT HIS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUITO 04812 02 OF 03 131708Z

"ECUADOREANITY". HE FINALLY MET THE CHARGE HEAD ON IN THE LAST WEEK WITH A PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH HIS SUPPORTERS LAID OUT THEIR EVIDENCE (INCLUDING A LETTER PREPARED IN THE EMBASSY). HE LOOKS TO POLL LESS THAN ONE-THIRD OF THE VOTES ON SUNDAY.

9. RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA CONTINUES TO CHUG ON SPENDING VAST AMOUNTS OF MONEY ON PUBLICITY, ESPECIALLY NEWSPAPER ADS, AND ON MASS RALLIES. OF ALL THE CANDIDATES, HE HAS CARRIED ON THE MOST TRADITIONAL ECUADOREAN CAMPAIGN, RELYING ON OLD STYLE ORATORY AND PROMISING EVERYTHING. PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS, WHO ARE MORE KEENLY AWARE OF THE DIVERGENT MAKE-UP OF THE HUERTA COALITION AND HIS HEAVY RELIANCE ON THE GUAYAQUIL OLIGARCHY WHILE CARVING A CENTER-LEFT IMAGE, FIND HIS TO BE THE MOST CYNICAL CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, WITH HIS MONEY, HIS APPEAL TO OLDER VOTERS, HIS BULWARKS ON THE COAST AND THE STRENGTH OF THE LIBERAL PARTY TRADITION, HE IS EXPECTED TO WIN 20-25 PERCENT OF THE VOTE.

10. JAIME ROLDOS, AT 37 THE YOUNGEST OF THE CANDIDATES, SEEMS TO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE MOST DRAMATIC INCREASE IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN. THE NEWSPAPER EL TELEGRAFO OF GUAYAQUIL WHICH HAS AGONIZED ABOUT ENDORSING EITHER SIXTO OR HUERTA AND WHICH HAS BEEN TRADITIONALLY HOSTILE TO BUCARAM AND THE CFP, RELEASED ITS OWN PRIVATE POLL WHICH SHOWED ROLDOS WITH 43 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN GUAYAS AND A 100,000 VOTE LEAD THERE OVER BOTH DURAN-BALLEN AND HUERTA. THIS WOULD BE ABOUT 80 PERCENT OF THE VOTE THAT BUCARAM HIMSELF COULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO GARNER HAD HE BEEN ALLOWED TO RUN. IF THE SAME PHENOMENON IS REPEATED IN OTHER COASTAL PROVINCES WHERE THE CFP HAS BEEN ABLE TO HOLD ITS OWN TRADITIONALLY AGAINST LIBERALS AND VELASQUISTAS, ROLDOS, NOT HUERTA, WOULD BE THE NET WINNER OF THE COASTAL PROVINCES. ROLDOS IS ALSO PICKING UP IN THE SIERRA THANKS LARGELY TO HIS POPULAR DEMOCRACY PARTNERS; HOWEVER, HE WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY IN FINISHING HIGHER THAN FOURTH HERE. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 QUITO 04812 02 OF 03 131708Z

WE HAVE NOTED A GENERAL SWING OF SYMPATHY AND RESPECT FOR ROLDOS IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS WHICH COULD PUT HIM IN THE RUN-OFF IF IT IS TRANSLATED INTO VOTES. AT ANY RATE, HE IS CURRENTLY EXPECTED TO BE IN THE 20-25 PERCENT RANGE.

11. RODRIGO BORGA HAS CAMPAIGNED VIGOROUSLY AND SERIOUSLY SINCE LAST YEAR AND DEMOCRATIC LEFT HAS BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH THROUGH THIS CAMPAIGN A LARGE STAKE IN THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL FUTURE. HOWEVER, BORJA, TRY AS HE MIGHT, HAS STILL NOT BEEN ABLE TO SHAKE HIS REGIONALISM. AHEAD, PERHAPS BY A HEALTHY MARGIN, IN QUITO BORJA STILL CANNOT REGISTER MUCH MORE THAN 5 PERCENT ON OPINION POLLS IN GUAYAQUIL DESPITE GREAT EFFORTS THERE. MOREOVER, MANY OF HIS ERSTWHILE SUPPORTERS, PERCEIVING THAT HE PROBABLY HAS NO CHANCE, MAY NOW BE EDGING TOWARD OTHER CANDIDATES. BORJA SHOULD POLL ABOUT 15 PERCENT.

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PAGE 01 QUITO 04812 03 OF 03 131715Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSC-01 TRSE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 QUITO 4812

12. THE OTHER TWO CANDIDATES ARE ABDON CALDERON OF THE RADICAL ALFARIST FRONT AND RENE MAUGE OF THE COMMUNIST FRONT FADI/UPD. CALDERON SEEMS TO BE LOSING VOTES EVERY TIME HE STEPS IN FRONT OF A TELEVISION CAMERA AND RECITES HIS WILD AND WOOLY ECONOMIC THEORIES AND MAY NOT ACHIEVE 5 PERCENT NATIONALLY. MAUGE, ON THE OTHER HAND, APPEARING REGULARLY IN HIS THREE-PIECE SUIT AND ESPOUSING A COM-

FORTABLE BRAND OF MARXISM, HAS IMPRESSED MANY. DESPITE A DIVIDED MARXIST MOVEMENT IN ECUADOR, MAUGE MAY POLL A VERY RESPECTABLE 5-10 PERCENT.

13. THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN FOUGHT FROM BEGINNING TO END MORE ON THE BASIS OF IMAGES THAN ON ISSUES OR IDEOLOGY. SIXTO'S "THE MAN WHO WORKS", HUERTA'S "OLD BANTAM ROOSTER" AND "WORD OF HONOR", ROLDOS' "FORCE OF CHANGE", AND BORGA'S "EQUITY WITH LIBERTY" HAVE BECOME THOROUGHLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE CANDIDATES. PROGRAM THEMES RECEIVING THE MOST ATTENTION, AND UPON WHICH THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE DISAGREEMENT AMONG THE CANDIDATES, HAVE BEEN AGRARIAN REFORM WITHOUT SACRIFICE OF PRODUCTIVITY, GREATER ATTENTION TO THE GUAYAQUIL SLUMS, PETROLEUM NATIONALISM
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PAGE 02 QUITO 04812 03 OF 03 131715Z

BUT WITH FOREIGN INVESTMENT, RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, BETTER NUTRITIONAL PROGRAMS, AND CONCERN OVER GROWING FOREIGN DEBT. SIGNIFICANTLY, NATIONAL DEFENSE HAS NOT BEEN RAISED (EXCEPT BY CALDERON) OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE GOE'S WISHES. ASIDE FROM RELATIONS WITH NICARGUA, WHICH HAS BEEN MENTIONED IN FEW CANDIDATES' SPEECHES, FOREIGN POLICY DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN AVOIDED. BASED UPON THEIR CAMPAIGNING AND OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE THREE TOP CANDIDATES WE BELIEVE THAT EACH IN THEIR OWN WAY COULD BECOME A VALUED INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATE OF THE US.

14. ALSO AT STAKE IN THE SUNDAY ELECTION IS THE SURVIVAL OF THE FOURTEEN RECOGNIZED POLITICAL PARTIES. ACCORDING TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES LAW, THOSE WHICH DO NOT ACHIEVE 5 PERCENT OF THE VOTES ON LISTS FOR THE COUNCILMANIC SEATS WILL HAVE TO ACHIEVE THAT FIGURE IN NEXT YEAR'S CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS TO RETAIN THEIR RIGHTS TO AN AUTOMATIC PLACE ON THE BALLOT. THREE PARTIES, FRA, POLULAR PATRIOTIC PARTY (PPP) AND NATIINALIST REVOLUTIONARY ECUADOREAN ALLIANCE (ARNE) MAY HAVE ALREADY FORFEITED THEIR RECONGINITION FOR THE NEXT YEAR'S ECLECIION BY INADVERTENTLY FAILING TO FILE LISTS IN A MINIMUM NUMBER OF PROVINCES. OF THE ELEVEN REMAINING, ONLY CFP, DEMOCRATIC LEFT, LIBERALS, AND CONSERVATIVES SEEM TO HAVE A FIRM PURCHASE ON THE ELECTORATE, WHILE THE OTHER SEVEN MAY HAVE TO STRUGGLE.

15. THE POLITICAL PROS HAVE CALLED THIS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT ELECTIONS TO PREDICT IN MEMORY. SOME OF THE IMPORACLNDERABLES BEARING ON THIS ARE THE FACT THAT IT IS THE FIRST NATIONAL ELECTION IN 10 YEARS, THE ABSENCE OF STRONG PARTIES WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE CFP AND NOW DEMOCRATIC LEFT, THE FACT THAT NEW VOTERS ACCOUNT FOR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUITO 04812 03 OF 03 131715Z

40 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE, THE EROSION OF REGIONALISM, AND THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION ON THE CAMPAIGN. SOME OF THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THAT PROS ARE PUZZLING OVER AND WHICH THEY BELIEVE WILL BE THE KEY TO THE FINAL RESULTS ARE: HOW WELL CAN SIXTO MAINTAIN THE TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE VOTE IN THE SIERRA? HOW LARGE WILL ROLDOS' MARGIN BE IN GUAYAS? HOW CLOSE CAN HUERTA COME TO THE 57 PERCENT HE POLLED IN MANABI IN 1956? HOW WILL THE VOTES IN EL ORO AND LOS RIOS BE DIVIDED? AND HOW LARGE WILL THE DISPARITY BE BETWEEN ROLDOS AND HUERTA IN PICHINCHA? IF THERE IS NOT A SERIOUS FOUL-UP, WE SHOULD KNOW BY MONDAY MORNING.

16. FINALLY, THERE IS THE VITAL CONTINGENT QUESTION ABOUT WHAT THE MILITARY DOES IF JAIME ROLDOS, DISCIPLE OF BUCARAM, BECOMES A DISTINCT PRESIDENTIAL POSSIBILITY AS A RESULT OF SUNDAY'S BALLOTING. THE ANSWER TO THIS MAY BE A BIT DELAYED.
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